

Public Hearing – March 7, 2022  
Committee on Environment

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie S. Dykes

**Raised House Bill No. 5291 – AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDING FOR BIKEWAYS, GREENWAYS AND RECREATIONAL TRAILS.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Raised House Bill No. 5291 - AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDING FOR BIKEWAYS, GREENWAYS AND RECREATIONAL TRAILS**. The purpose of this bill is to increase the level of state general obligation bond authorization available for the greenways, bikeways and recreational trails grant program from the current \$3 million to \$6 million for FY 2023.

**DEEP provides the following testimony to provide the legislature with additional background** on the recreational trails program. DEEP stands ready to responsibly administer the level of grant funding that is ultimately authorized.

The Connecticut recreational trails grant program funds nonprofit organizations, municipalities, state departments and tribal governments for the construction of new trails, maintenance/restoration of existing trails, purchase/lease of equipment, acquisition of trail easements, and developing trail access for people with disabilities. This program has been tremendously successful in facilitating the planning, design, construction and maintenance of multi-use trails across the state. Connecticut's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) public opinion surveys consistently rank recreational trails at the very top of community assets and needs for the future. During the pandemic UConn's CT Trail Census documents a "...sustained increase in Connecticut trail use...more than half of the trails recorded an increase of 68% or greater, compared to June 2019."<sup>1</sup>

To date, more than half of all communities across the state have benefited from the Connecticut Recreational Trails Grant program. These funds leverage significant private support, (nonprofit organizations, municipalities, tribal governments), doubling the 20% required non-state matching. Recreational trails create positive impacts for tourism, economic development, public health care, alternative transportation and community resiliency here in CT. Positive state and municipal economic impacts include taxes resulting from monies spent on lodging, transportation, souvenirs, restaurants and bars, groceries, take-out food and drinks, admissions and fees, clothing and sporting goods.

In the Fall of 2021, DEEP issued a request for recreational trails proposals for \$3 million in authorized bond funding and received an unprecedented 65 applications requesting over \$22

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ctrailcensus.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2046/2020/07/June-2020\\_COVID-19-Trail-Impact-Report.pdf](https://ctrailcensus.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2046/2020/07/June-2020_COVID-19-Trail-Impact-Report.pdf)

million, including \$7 million in highly ranked proposals. DEEP funded \$3 million to support twenty exciting projects across the state – a full list of funded projects can be viewed [here](#).

DEEP currently has \$3 million in authorized, but unallocated bond funding as well as an additional \$3 million of bond funding budgeted for FY23 (\$6 million total). This bill would increase the FY 23 bond authorization for the Recreational Trails and Greenways Grants program from \$3 million to \$6 million for FY 2023, providing \$9M in total authorized funding in available in FY23.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Harrison Nantz at [Harrison.Nantz@ct.gov](mailto:Harrison.Nantz@ct.gov).